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75th plenary meeting
Wednesday, 5 December 2001, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Han Seung-soo ..... (Republic of Korea)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Kumalo (South Africa), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 108

Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family

Plenary meetings devoted to volunteering to mark the closing of the International Year of Volunteers

Report of the Secretary-General (A/56/288)

Draft resolution (A/56/L.27)

The Acting President: The General Assembly, pursuant to resolution 55/57 of 4 December 2000 and its decision adopted at the 3rd plenary meeting, on 19 September 2001, will devote today two plenary meetings to volunteering, to mark the closing of the International Year of Volunteers, under agenda item 108.

The following is a statement of the President of the General Assembly on this occasion.

"Today marks the closing of the International Year of Volunteers 2001, which provided a valuable opportunity to heighten public awareness and support for volunteerism at a global level. During this period, more than 120 national committees of United Nations Member States hosted various activities in some 200 cities including seminars, exhibitions and campaigns in celebration of volunteers.

"We are in need of volunteers more than ever. These days, we face growing problems of a national as well as transnational nature: environmental degradation, poverty, HIV/AIDS, drug trafficking and terrorism, to name just a few. Volunteers all over the world can make significant contributions to solving these problems through their activities in the fields of social and economic development, humanitarian aid, the promotion of peace, democracy and, in particular, respect for human rights.

"Volunteering is different from other types of human activity because, among other reasons, volunteers usually bring a distinctive enthusiasm and exuberance to their works. Moreover, volunteer work is enriching for the individual volunteer. People who volunteer are better able to develop their potentialities, share knowledge and skills and gain opportunities for career advancement.

"Volunteering also enhances the self-esteem of participants, helps people learn from each other and widens social, economic and cultural networks around the world. In this regard, I would like to highly commend the United Nations Volunteers programme and its Executive Coordinator, Ms. Sharon Capeling-Alakija, for

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their devoted efforts to assist developing countries by sending out about 4,000 United Nations volunteers each year.

"Let us renew our commitment, individually and collectively, to supporting the volunteer movement. Above all, it is the fundamental human desire to help each other that we need to mobilize and channel in order to build a harmonious and peaceful world. Volunteerism is thus at the heart of the ideals of the United Nations and should be the future for all of us."

I now call on the representative of Japan to introduce draft resolution A/56/L.27.

Mr. Watanabe (Japan): I should like to begin by offering my heartfelt congratulations to Secretary-General Annan and to the United Nations itself on being jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for 2001. This gives great pleasure to Japan, as it is the International Year of Volunteers that we have been promoting. The Nobel committee's decision to honour Secretary-General Annan and the United Nations with this illustrious award reflects the international community's utmost esteem for the United Nations tireless efforts to achieve world peace and prosperity under our Secretary-General's outstanding leadership.

While mourning the victims of the 11 September terrorist attacks on the United States and expressing my profound condolences to their bereaved families, I would also like to convey my sincere sympathy to the American people and the United States Government for their dreadful loss. The terrorists' cowardly acts were a vile assault not only on the United States, but on all of humanity — beyond contempt and absolutely unforgivable.

Amid this tragedy, the one bright spot in our hearts came from the countless volunteers who rushed to the disaster sites from throughout the United States and across the globe to offer both spiritual and material support to the victims and their families. We were all deeply moved when we saw these volunteers selflessly assisting the citizens, as well as the local fire fighters and police officers.

The Government of Japan originally proposed the International Year of Volunteers back in 1997 as a result of our own experience of crises that threaten precious human life. Some 6,000 Japanese died in the great Hanshin-Awaji earthquake of January 1995 and massive damages were suffered. The earnest efforts of the Japanese and foreign volunteers who came to assist the local residents in their time of need minimized the damage and provided a great impetus for the subsequent reconstruction works. This phenomenal support led us to recognize anew the critical role of volunteers in contemporary society.

Not only do volunteers reaffirm our faith in humanity during major tragedies; they also play an important role in our daily lives in diverse fields, ranging from nursing care for the elderly to environmental preservation. A vast number of volunteers are also directly or indirectly involved with providing humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan and assistance to the refugees from the present conflict there.

While the end of the cold war and the progress of globalization are providing diverse benefits in economic development, they are also forcing us to recognize the many grave direct threats to human life that transcend national boundaries, such as poverty, environmental destruction, armed conflicts, land mines, the displacement of refugees, illicit drugs and HIV/AIDS. In order to cope with such threats, the Government of Japan has been calling on the international community to acknowledge the importance of the concept of human security, to protect the lives and dignity of each and every human being and so that all people can pursue their abundant potential to enjoy creative and worthwhile lives.

Today, thousands of Japanese are engaged in voluntary activities across the globe under the auspices of the Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers and United Nations Volunteers programmes. I believe that these types of individual voluntary activities at the grass-roots level are in deep harmony with the concept of human security, which emphasizes respect for the individual.

As the initial advocate of the International Year of Volunteers, Japan has been actively implementing related works from an early date. In the spring of 1999, we launched a domestic system towards achieving the four goals of the International Year of Volunteers and this has served as the main framework for Government organs and private-sector enterprises to support International Year activities. Numerous events have been held throughout the country, and the Japanese media have assisted with the public relations work. The

Cabinet Office has also sponsored numerous forums and symposiums, and collected and displayed photographs, paintings and haiku related to volunteerism. The Japanese postal service has issued a commemorative stamp. For those who make donations to non-profit organizations, the preferential tax treatment system came into operation this October.

In addition to these domestic efforts, Japan has also provided support for the establishment of International Year of Volunteers committees in many nations, and has made every possible effort to support vibrant activities related to the International Year of Volunteers on a worldwide scale.

With these experiences in mind, Japan, along with the Netherlands, would like to introduce the draft resolution entitled "Recommendations on support for volunteering". We believe that those recommendations can serve as a guide to Governments, as well as to the United Nations system, to extend further support for volunteer activities.

The 2002 International Federation of Association Football World Cup will be sponsored by Japan and the Republic of Korea. Volunteers will play an essential role in that event by assisting the teams, supporters and media from each nation. Those volunteers will include foreigners living in Japan, who will provide information, interpretation and first aid to spectators from around the world.

I believe that volunteerism is an activity that deepens the bonds that connect individual human beings. In Japan we have a traditional saying from the ancient culture of the tea ceremony. *Ichi-go ichi-e* means that we should treasure every encounter, for it will never recur. I believe that the World Cup will provide an opportunity for many Japanese and Koreans to enjoy the fruits of such once-in-a-lifetime meetings.

While these meetings mark the closing of the International Year of Volunteers, we think it is critical to maintain the momentum that has been built up over the year. We cannot allow the International Year of Volunteers to end merely as a single-year event. Rather, we must seize this opportunity to use the foundations cultivated during the International Year of Volunteers as a springboard to a brighter future and as the first year of voluntary efforts towards creating a new and better society. We truly hope that the spirit of the United Nations in proclaiming the first year of the new century the International Year of Volunteers will continue to be honoured by the activities of the United Nations and each of the Member States in the years to come.

In closing, I would like to praise the United Nations Volunteers for their outstanding achievements in promoting the International Year of Volunteers, and to express our high expectations for their continued efforts in the future. The Government of Japan will certainly continue to strive to contribute to the international community, together with the United Nations Volunteers.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Netherlands to also introduce draft resolution A/56/L.27.

Mr. Peters (Netherlands): Allow me to add a few words of introduction to complement the statement made by the representative of Japan in introducing the draft resolution before us today (A/56/L.27). Let me first turn to the main paragraphs.

The preambular paragraphs refer to other United Nations texts dealing with volunteering. I would like to point out that those paragraphs take note of resolutions of the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and the Commission for Social Development, as well as final documents of recent conferences. Furthermore, the contribution of volunteers to society is recognized. We have all realized how topical this is.

Paragraph 6 introduces the recommendations contained in the annex. The draft resolution then calls upon Governments and the organizations of the United Nations system to give those recommendations due consideration in their work. Finally, paragraph 9 allows the General Assembly to assess the outcome of the International Year of Volunteers next year, drawing on a report from the Secretary-General.

The major achievement of the draft resolution is of course the recommendations contained in its annex. The recommendations are intended to provide Governments and the organizations of the United Nations system with options regarding their policies on volunteering. They are based on the Secretary-General's report contained in document A/56/288, which reflects experiences and ideas from all over the world. As is stressed in paragraph 3 of section I of the annex, on general considerations, the recommendations do not advocate one single model of best practice, since what works well in one country may not work

well in another with very different cultures and traditions.

I would like to give the Assembly a few examples of the recommendations. Among other things, the following policy options are recommended: publicly recognizing the contribution of volunteers to society; encouraging public sector workers to set an example; establishing a volunteer centre or focal point; using media to disseminate a positive image of volunteers, as well as concrete information; and enabling as many people as possible to benefit from doing volunteer work. More generally, the recommendations suggest creating conditions to facilitate the work of volunteers. Governments and organizations of the United Nations system are also asked to integrate the contribution of volunteers in development planning. More generally, the United Nations system would see that there are many opportunities for it to benefit from in the contribution of volunteers. Finally, we are called upon to recognize the work of United Nations Volunteers.

I would like to draw the Assembly's attention to a few changes to be made to the text. To accommodate all delegations and to enable the adoption of the draft resolution by consensus, the following changes have been made to document A/56/L.27.

The first change is in paragraph 6 of the draft resolution. That paragraph should read as follows:

> "*Lays down* recommendations on ways Governments and the United Nations system could support volunteering, in the annex to the present resolution".

The second small change is to be made in subparagraph (a) (iii) of paragraph 1 of section II of the annex, on government support. The paragraph should read as follows:

> "Disseminate the results of studies and surveys on the contribution of volunteerism, where they exist, through the media, schools, non-governmental organizations and other channels."

The third small change is in (b)(ii) of paragraph 1 of section II of the annex, where the words "and organizations" are inserted at the end of the second sentence, so that the sentence reads:

> "National volunteer centres provide effective leadership in the formal volunteer movement, while regional and local centres ensure linkages with the grass-roots communities and organizations."

The fourth and last change is in section III of the annex. In the first line of paragraph 1 the word "relevant" is inserted, to read:

> "It is recommended that the relevant organizations and bodies of the United Nations system ...".

I would like to read out the sponsors that were not mentioned in document A/56/L.27 but have joined later. These are Barbados, Belarus, Bhutan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Colombia, Comoros, Costa Rica, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Ghana, Guatemala, Kyrgyzstan, Lithuania, Madagascar, Malaysia, Marshall Islands, Mongolia, Myanmar, Niger, Solomon Islands, Sudan, Swaziland, Sweden, Thailand, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, United Republic of Tanzania, Uruguay, Yugoslavia, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

The sponsors trust that the draft resolution will be adopted without a vote later today.

Mr. De Loecker (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): I have the honour of speaking on behalf of the European Union. The countries of Central and Eastern Europe associated with the European Union — Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia — and the associated countries Cyprus, Malta and Turkey, as well as Iceland and Liechtenstein as European Free Trade Association countries members of the European Economic Area, associate themselves with this statement.

The decision taken by the General Assembly in 1997 to designate 2001 the International Year of Volunteers, the closing of which we are celebrating today, has done much to focus the attention of the international community on voluntary activities.

Volunteering exists in one form or another in most societies. Helping others by giving one's time and effort, of one's own free will and without pay, is a form of social and human behaviour that has yet to receive the recognition that it deserves. Volunteering promotes social participation and active citizenship and strengthens civil society. It can also help to maintain social stability and cohesion. Volunteering in its various forms is a benefit to society, for it is a conduit

for universal values in the fields of human rights, democracy, the fight against racism, solidarity and sustainable development.

When underprivileged individuals and people living free from need join together in voluntary activities, innovative partnerships can be created and bridges built between the various sectors of society. Voluntary work is therefore also a major factor in the fight against poverty.

The activities of volunteers also impact on many areas of global interest, particularly awareness of violations of human rights, environmental protection, the universal ban on anti-personnel mines, the fight against racism, women's rights, health, and managing and mitigating the effects of disasters, to name but a few.

It is the task of Governments to draw up strategies and programmes to promote volunteer work. However, if the scope of volunteer programmes is to be expanded and their long-term viability guaranteed, there must be a partnership between the public authorities and civil society. Volunteering offers a vast pool of skills and resources, ready to be invested in governmental projects. Joint action by public authorities and volunteer associations can help both to achieve their common objectives.

Volunteering also offers considerable benefits to the volunteers themselves. The men and women who engage in voluntary activities have the opportunity to strengthen social, economic and cultural contacts, acquire practical knowledge, and develop a number of personal and professional skills, thus improving their chances of employment. Volunteering creates a reserve of goodwill, which can be drawn on when necessary.

Many young people are active in various forms of voluntary work. This helps develop creativity and an enterprising spirit in young people and contributes to social innovation. Young people who do voluntary work are better able to develop their capacities and share knowledge, making them more employable and better able to participate in society in general.

During this International Year of Volunteers, the Ministers of the European Union meeting in the Youth Council approved on 29 November a resolution on the benefits of voluntary activities by young people in the context of the development of European Community action on the issue of youth. It invites member States to take the measures they deem appropriate to remove legal and administrative obstacles so as to provide every opportunity for youth voluntary activity in a national and international context.

The resolution invites the Commission and the member States of the Union, within their respective spheres of competence, to take measures to strengthen, qualitatively and quantitatively, the role of volunteering among young people and to take as their guide, where appropriate, the strategic objectives formulated by the United Nations in the framework of the International Year of Volunteers. It also exhorts them to develop a policy on volunteering for young people and to strengthen European cooperation in this area, using the following strategic objectives of the United Nations resolution declaring 2001 the International Year of Volunteers: access to and promotion of voluntary activities, recognition and support for voluntary activities, incentives and facilities, the creation of a network between all parties involved and, finally, quality care. The resolution invites the member States and the European Commission to recognize the importance of experience gained in the context of youth voluntary activity and to collate and exchange good practice in that regard. Finally, it asks them to support all the parties involved in the implementation of voluntary activity for young people.

In adopting that resolution, the European Union Ministers meeting at the Youth Council wished to highlight the role of the main players in youth policy, which is to say young people themselves and social and educational actors. The resolution also seeks to give volunteering its rightful place among the initiatives that resulted from the European Commission's white paper on youth.

The European Union would like to emphasize how much importance it attaches to developing volunteering for middle-aged and elderly persons, which already plays an important role in very many countries. This form of volunteering, which supplements the voluntary work done by young people, allows for an intergenerational transfer of knowledge and experience and is of great benefit not only to society, but also to the volunteers themselves, who avoid exclusion or rejection by younger generations.

The European Union takes this opportunity to draw Member States' attention to the draft resolution

on recommendations on support for volunteering, which was jointly introduced by the Netherlands and Japan today.

The European Union wishes to congratulate the United Nations Volunteers programme, which acted as central coordinator for the International Year of Volunteers, on the work it has undertaken in order to achieve better recognition for volunteering, facilitate the action of volunteers, set up networks and promote volunteering. The European Union wishes to reaffirm its support for the United Nations Volunteers and encourages them to continue their efforts, for the benefit of the quality and quantity of volunteering throughout the world.

Mr. Shen Guofang (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): Volunteerism is an ideal reflection of the love, dedication, unity and service that are part of the richness of humanity. Volunteer services and voluntary participation in social life without pay are becoming an important part of human activities. They represent action to advance social development and to promote human progress. In this context, it is very important and useful for the development of international volunteerism that the United Nations has declared this year the International Year of Volunteers and carried out a series of relevant activities in this regard. I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to the Secretary-General, who has actively promoted advances in this field, and my highest regard for volunteers and volunteer organizations around the world.

The Chinese Government attaches great importance to the International Year of Volunteers. With the support of President Jiang Zemin, China has set up the National Committee for the International Year of Volunteers 2001, headed by State Councillor Wu Yi and composed of more than 30 government ministries and commissions, as well as non-governmental organizations. The Committee has been designed specifically to coordinate and plan activities for the realization of four major goals in China during the International Year of Volunteers.

After years of efforts, a nationwide network of volunteer service organizations has taken shape in China. According to statistics, more than 24,000 service centres have been established across the country, which have provided more than 80 million work shifts amounting to more than 4.1 billion hours of voluntary service. Among the volunteers were students, teachers, medical doctors and people from the scientific, technological and all other sectors of society. Their contributions and efforts have not only hugely benefited China's economic and social development but also played a highly positive role in promoting social stability, trust and integration, as well as cultural development and social values.

In order to create a legal basis for volunteer services in China, some provinces and cities have in recent years adopted local laws and regulations in this regard, providing a favourable social environment and protection for voluntary activities.

Young volunteers are the main force of volunteerism in China today, whose work basically includes the following. First is the promotion of development and the eradication of poverty. In 1996 China launched the Young Volunteers' Poverty-alleviation Relay Programme, which has recruited volunteers to work, each for a certain time period, in long-term relays for different initiatives. Altogether, the programme has recruited and sent 10,000 volunteers to 207 poor counties to do voluntary work for a period of half a year to two years in the fields of basic education, health and public hygiene, the promotion of the use of new technologies in agriculture and so on. Their work has helped poor counties in all these aspects and improved their capacity for self-development. Moreover, about 1 million college and high school students have been organized to go to poor and disaster-stricken rural areas every summer to carry out volunteer activities.

Second is community services and public welfare. Regular one-on-one assistance arrangements have been made for young volunteers to help more than 2.5 million poor families in both urban and rural areas. Volunteers across the country have regularly provided care and health services to the old, the disabled, orphans and other vulnerable groups. They have also organized events to reduce illiteracy and promote the learning of science and technology, as well as cultural and entertainment events.

The third is environmental protection. In 1999 the Chinese Government launched an environmental movement of young volunteers called Protect the Mother River. The Government has also recruited people to plant trees and fight against desertification, water pollution and "white" pollution from plastic waste in important areas along the Yellow River.

Over the past 20 years or so, the Chinese Government and civil society have carried out very fruitful cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Volunteers programme. Since 1981 almost 200 United Nations Volunteers have been sent to China, and they have made remarkable contributions in education, health, science and technology, environmental protection, poverty alleviation and other fields. China has also sent, through this organization, more than 160 volunteers to more than 30 developing countries to work in the fields of agriculture, water conservation, health and so on. Volunteer service is becoming an important channel of exchange and cooperation between China and the rest of the world.

Mr. Pierson (United States of America): I am pleased to represent the United States of America in my remarks before the United Nations General Assembly in support of volunteerism, both in the United States and internationally.

In the United States, the Points of Light Foundation and the Association of Junior Leagues International partnered to convene and lead the United States International Year of Volunteers Steering Committee. This Committee has assembled a broad community of 1,121 organizations representing all 50 States and has brought new recognition to volunteerism. The United States registry includes a diversity of organizations from every socio-economic bracket, a wide array of ethnic and racial diversity and a broad spectrum of generations. Examples include Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, Rotarians, Student Government Associations and HIV/AIDS outreach groups. The list is a who's who of volunteer organizations, and the number of groups continues to grow.

America, President Bush and his Administration actively support volunteerism, and, in fact, it was one of the cornerstones of our society even before we achieved independence. As early as the 1820s, a famous visitor to the United States — Alexis de Tocqueville — in his masterpiece *Democracy in America* identified volunteerism as one of the most visible characteristics of the new nation and as one of the attributes that most distinguished us from the old world. Almost two centuries later, we can still point to de Tocqueville's insight with great pride and marvel that we were and remain a nation of volunteers.

I have the honour and privilege of being a part of the President's Administration as Acting Deputy Director of the Peace Corps. The Peace Corps has been a major part of my life and of my family. Previously, I have served as Country Director in Ghana, Botswana, Namibia and Swaziland and I helped establish programmes in Zimbabwe, Armenia, Bulgaria and Uzbekistan.

Many in this General Assembly have had first-hand experience with United States Peace Corps volunteers. It is very common for an ambassador to say that an American volunteer taught him or her in secondary school. It is with great satisfaction that we can say that a Peace Corps volunteer has frequently been able to make a difference in someone's life. At times, that someone has later occupied high-level positions in his or her Government. A case in point is the story of Mr. Alejandro Toledo, the President of Peru, who credits the help of two Peace Corps volunteers in his early life. We are very proud that he has accepted the National Peace Corps Association invitation to be the keynote speaker at the Peace Corps fortieth anniversary celebrations in June of next year.

In the United States, seven current members of the United States Congress have served as Peace Corps volunteers.

When faced with challenges such as illiteracy, poverty, crime and environmental problems, America has always relied upon the dedication and action of the volunteer community. Today, many groups have discovered the hunger in people's hearts to help others, and their overwhelming willingness to do so. America's International Year of Volunteers Steering Committee established a goal to celebrate and advocate volunteerism around the world through a strategy of awareness, engagement and capacity-building.

Nowhere was this strategy more clearly demonstrated than during and following the tragic events of 11 September. As workers in New York, Washington and Pennsylvania, as well as others throughout the United States, demonstrated, volunteers are at the very core of our survival as a society.

We witnessed the teams of volunteer firemen who travelled hundreds of miles to work at ground zero and the volunteers of the American Red Cross, who continue to help the survivors and their families cope with the aftermath. Proof of our willingness to help others is evident in the neighbour who spends hours

preparing meals, takes care of a survivor's child or simply lends an ear to listen. Each of these people, each of these actions, makes an important difference.

Many individuals throughout America devote much of their time and energy to helping others. This help is generally provided through government, non-profit and non-governmental organizations, corporations and faith-based groups. The United States Government is a strong advocate of volunteerism, both domestic and international.

The United States Government also partners through the Peace Corps with the United Nations Volunteers programme, described as one of the hidden jewels of the United Nations system. Close to 5,000 men and women representing over 150 nationalities are serving each year in developing countries as United Nations Volunteers. This year alone, the United Nations Volunteers programme mobilized 900 United Nations Volunteers to serve in the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor. These efforts are lead by Kevin Gilroy, a former Peace Corps volunteer.

Domestically, the Corporation for National and Community Service carries on the volunteer tradition by working with state commissions, non-profit organizations, faith-based groups, schools and other civic and community organizations to provide volunteer opportunities for all Americans. The Corporation for National and Community Service has three major service initiatives: AmeriCorps, Learn and Serve America and the National Senior Service Corps.

AmeriCorps engages more than 50,000 Americans in intensive, results-driven service. On 8 November of this year, President Bush called for the Corporation to mobilize more than 20,000 new Senior Corps and AmeriCorps participants in the coming year to support police departments, fire departments, our parks and recreation departments, public health agencies and disaster preparedness and mitigation to assist the personnel in those agencies.

Many schools are discovering the value of service learning through projects that link education and service. At the forefront of this movement is Learn and Serve America, which helps support nearly 1 million students, from kindergarten through college, who are meeting community needs while improving their academic skills and learning the habits of good citizenship.

And we should not forget the important role that senior citizens can make as volunteers. In our society, we strongly support senior citizens to pass along their knowledge and experience to others through volunteer work. Seniors are one of America's most vital resources, offering a wealth of experience and energy. Through the National Senior Service Corps, nearly half a million Americans, age 55 and older, share their time and talents to help solve local problems.

President George H. W. Bush founded the Points of Light Foundation in 1990 as a non-partisan, non-profit organization devoted to promoting volunteer community service. Through its network of over 500 volunteer centres, the Foundation strives to bring people together through volunteer service as a powerful way to combat alienation and alleviate social problems. Dr. Norman Brown, Chairman of the Points of Light Foundation, has done an exemplary job over the past year to lead the United States International Year of the Volunteers (IYV) efforts.

Outstanding non-profit and non-government supported organizations are also plentiful in the United States. Another important leader in the United States International Year of the Volunteer effort has been Clotilde Dedecker, former President of the Association of Junior Leagues International. This Association represents 296 Junior Leagues in the United States, Canada, Mexico and Great Britain. For over 100 years, Junior Leagues have promoted volunteerism, working toward developing the full potential of women and improving local communities.

The 193,000 dedicated and creative women members come from varying backgrounds and interests. These talented women discovered back in 1901 the extraordinary power in volunteer numbers. Junior Leagues across the United States have award-winning programmes addressing the needs of homeless and near-homeless women and children, family violence and abuse prevention, comprehensive day care and short-term respite care for children affected by HIV/AIDS, and legal, housing and employment assistance.

The Honourable Colin Powell, the United States Secretary of State, founded America's Promise in 1997. Following a presidential summit attended by President Clinton, President George H. W. Bush, President Carter, President Ford, with First Lady Nancy Reagan representing her husband, a challenge came forth for

America to make our youth a national priority. America's Promise has created a diverse and growing alliance of nearly 500 national organizations to build upon the character and competence of our nation's youth.

Countless other volunteer organizations help Americans address their problems every day.

In support of international volunteerism, the Government of the United States created and supports the Peace Corps. Founded by President John F. Kennedy in 1961, the history of the Peace Corps is the story of tens of thousands of people who have served as volunteers. Their individual experiences in towns, villages and cities around the world have composed a legacy of service that has become part of United States history. Peace Corps volunteers teach English and work in business development, the environment, agriculture, health and community development. We also have special programmes in HIV/AIDS and technology. The Peace Corps Crisis Corps programme has helped mobilize returned Peace Corps volunteers to help on disaster relief projects.

Currently, the United States has more than 7,000 Peace Corps volunteers in 70 countries around the world. More than 163,000 volunteers have served in 135 countries during the past 40 years.

As President John F. Kennedy dispatched the first group of Peace Corps volunteers to Ghana in 1961, he made a prediction: that "The logic of the Peace Corps is that someday we are going to bring it home to America". It is on that foundation that the Peace Corps, 40 years ago, began developing what is called its third goal, which is to help educate Americans about the countries in which it serves. Returned Peace Corps volunteers have formed in the United States "friends of" groups, ranging from the Friends of Afghanistan to the Friends of Zambia. These groups help to educate Americans about the volunteers' countries of service.

The Peace Corps has a formal programme called the Paul D. Coverdell World-Wise Schools Programme, in which current volunteers are matched with schools in the United States to help educate students about their countries of service. As one volunteer from Central Asia was quoted on a United States television network as saying, "I have a family in the United States that I love, but I also love my host country family."

As the Secretary-General eloquently stated at the very outset of his report to the General Assembly earlier this year (A/56/288),

> "Volunteerism is an important component of any strategy aimed at poverty reduction, sustainable development and social integration, in particular overcoming social exclusion and discrimination."

Recently, President and Mrs. Bush have focused our attention on the plight of the children and women of Afghanistan. Children all across the United States have responded with remarkable generosity and with deep compassion for Afghan children by sending in a dollar towards relief efforts for Afghan children. The First Lady has drawn our attention to efforts assisting Afghan women. In the first-ever radio address by a First Lady, Laura Bush stated that

> "Fighting brutality against women and children is not the expression of a specific culture; it is the acceptance of our common humanity: a commitment shared by people of goodwill on every continent."

I am very proud to have been able to speak about the efforts of the United States to promote volunteerism as we close the International Year of Volunteers. We have enjoyed excellent leadership from those individuals I have mentioned here today, as well as from the countless thousands who find the time to volunteer their efforts, skills and time each and every day. I am certain that they would agree with Simone Weil when she stated that "You have not lived until you have done something for someone who can never repay you".

Ms. Niehuis (Germany): While Germany fully endorses and subscribes to the European Union statement on this item, allow me to seize this opportunity to make a few remarks on German activities related to the International Year of Volunteers. The Year produced numerous useful initiatives for a policy to promote voluntary social work in Germany: in the municipalities and cities, in the federal Länder and at the federal level. In that context, for instance, a German Bundestag Enquete Commission, for instance, deals with promoting community work and voluntary social work; in the spring of 2002 it will be presenting proposals on how the framework conditions must be changed in the interest of voluntary social work.

Our country has enjoyed a long and sound tradition of voluntary work in the various sectors of youth and women's work, welfare, sports, and areas such as fire brigades, rescue services and politics. For example, in Germany, more than a million volunteers are available to fire brigades.

However, it is only now that a common cross-sectoral understanding of these areas of voluntary work and a corresponding coherent concept for a policy to promote voluntary social commitment are beginning to develop in the federal Government, the Länder and the municipalities, essentially encouraged by the fillip provided by the International Year of Volunteers.

Even before the International Year of Volunteers took off, we were able to publish the results of the first representative nationwide survey on voluntary work and community service in Germany, and in doing so to render more visible the scope and variety of the voluntary social work that is being done. At the same time, the survey showed the unexpectedly high potential that exists for voluntary commitment.

Thirty-four per cent of the population over the age of 14 years — in other words, 22 million women and men — are doing voluntary work; almost another third, another 20 million, show an interest in taking up commitments or doing additional voluntary work. We have taken on the challenge of making use of that potential and of opening up new access to voluntary social commitment, with a campaign for the International Year of Volunteers entitled "My skills are invaluable". Elements of that campaign are the Internet home page www.freiwillig.de — *freiwillig* being the German word for "voluntary" — advertisements and posters, a campaign kit, the magazine *Freiwillig* and a travelling exhibition: instruments just like or similar to those employed in many other countries as well. The campaign was designed to support activities carried out by voluntary organizations in commemoration of the International Year of Volunteers; those organizations regularly fell back on it. It also enjoyed considerable success in the media.

The networking of various social areas such as sports, youth, the welfare sector, the media, enterprises, trade unions, churches, self-help organizations and voluntary agencies was done essentially by our National Advisory Committee for the International Year of Volunteers and through its working groups, their events and projects.

Networking and recognition are the two objectives of the International Year of Volunteers. We were able successfully to incorporate those two objectives in Germany and to take full advantage of the opportunities which the International Year of Volunteers provided. We intend to carry on this improved networking and cooperation beyond 2001 in the form of a platform or an alliance for voluntary work as a means of coordinating and supporting initiatives to promote voluntary involvement at the federal level and of facilitating national and international exchanges of experience. These future initiatives also include the implementation of proposals which will be submitted in the coming year by the parliamentary Enquete Commission on the future of community work to the German Bundestag. Those proposals are intended to improve especially the legal and financial framework conditions for voluntary work, and are meant also to establish a coherent policy for the promotion of voluntary social work on a permanent basis.

In Germany, the concept of the voluntary social year and the voluntary ecological year has for many years provided young people with the opportunity to do voluntary work for the community. We have made use of the International Year to prepare a law to place these opportunities on a better footing and to expand their scope.

In the course of the Year, we became more involved than before in international cooperation in the area of volunteering. In that effort we were supported by the United Nations Volunteers. The coordinating role that body played in the International Year of Volunteers from its headquarters at Bonn was undoubtedly evident worldwide. We also have to thank our next-door neighbour the Netherlands, host of the international conference on the International Year of Volunteers, for many an inspiration.

Voluntary social work, carried out without an eye to financial gain, is also very important in the area of development cooperation. Development cooperation is more than just the dispatching of highly paid experts or the financing of ambitious development projects; it also relies, not least, on the commitment of numerous voluntary workers in non-governmental organizations, town-twinning projects or third world groups, as well as on the untiring efforts of thousands of development workers, for whom it is not financial incentives that are at the forefront, but rather person-to-person contact, the

interest in exchange with other cultures and international solidarity.

Along with the State-run German Development Service, the Federal Government also funds five additional non-governmental development agencies. Together, these agencies employ approximately 1,500 development workers per year, who have undertaken to work as experts for a period of at least two years in a developing country.

The federal Government supports the sending of development workers abroad with an annual contribution of some 160 million deutsche marks. Consultations on the possible deployment of development workers, as well as shorter working and study visits in developing countries, is a service provided by the Working Group on Learning and Helping Overseas, which is an association comprising a total of 26 organizations active in personnel-related development cooperation, voluntary community services and extracurricular youth and educational work.

Furthermore, the Federal Government makes a yearly contribution to the United Nations Volunteers programme to the tune of 3.5 million deutsche marks.

Voluntary social work constitutes the foundation of a democratic society and is the basis of social cohesion and sustained development in society. Volunteers are society's capital. However, volunteer work is, of itself, not a renewable resource. It requires public recognition, it needs fostering and supportive framework conditions. And not least, it requires a State which plays an activating role and which, in its role as legislator, creates the framework conditions that would foster social commitment, eliminate disadvantages, for example in tax law, promote a culture of recognition and seek a relationship based on partnership with citizens committed to doing voluntary service and to their organizations.

In this context we, in our various Governments and administrations, have some catching up to do, and this applies to both national and international organizations. This is why we are sponsoring draft resolution A/56/L.27, containing the "Recommendations on support for volunteering" submitted to the General Assembly at this session. We are hoping that these recommendations will receive wide support and, above all, that they will be subsequently implemented. For, just as our own society thrives on participation and voluntary work, it follows that the more participation and social inclusion are at the foundation of international cooperation and policy, the more volunteer work is promoted in international agencies and structures, as well, and the more the non-governmental organization are taken seriously as partners in all areas of policy, the faster global civil society will be able to overcome exclusion and injustice and the more sustained will be its development.

Today, on 5 December 2001, 1,200 volunteers will be celebrating in Berlin with the Federal Chancellor, Gerhard Schroeder, and the Federal Minister for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, Christine Bergmann, to close the International Year of Volunteers in Germany. The fact that they will be doing this together with so many other volunteers all over the world is an encouraging sign for our future.

My wish for us all is that the impetus given by this commemorative year will continue to carry us along the path towards overcoming poverty and exclusion and towards greater justice and peace in the world.

Mr. Karoui (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): Today Tunisia is sharing with the international community the celebration of the closure of the International Year of Volunteers. In the outcome document of its twenty-fourth special session, on social development, the General Assembly underscored the responsibility borne by Government in establishing global and comprehensive strategies to promote volunteering.

We believe that volunteering plays an important role in safeguarding the stability and cohesion of societies, because it is an expression of solidarity and a genuine will to cooperate within societies and among them. These activities also build trust, pride and a sense of sacrifice and enhance the volunteers' sense of belonging to society.

Volunteer service is an essential element of growth and development in all economic and social areas in developing countries. Civil society and non-governmental organizations in particular participate effectively and responsibly in supporting Governments' efforts in development.

We believe that the volunteer's role has become more urgent with the advent of globalization, because

we must recognize the positive role of volunteers in mitigating the negative effects of globalization and in building a balance in international relations so as to create a world of justice, complementarity and well-being.

Tunisia has opted for an approach to development based on solidarity among all sectors of society according to its cultural values, and we highly prize volunteerism. Voluntary work is not new to Tunisian society. Indeed, this is a value that has been deeply ingrained in our culture and traditions and has been so since old times. Since the changes that have taken place, the State has striven to enhance voluntary work and to promote it into a cultural value within global society.

The creation of a national fund in 1993 to fund and promote volunteer social activities is just one token of the sense of solidarity and volunteering that permeates Tunisian society. These activities include provision of drinking water and electricity, the building of roads, giving access to remote villages, and enhancing access of vulnerable sectors of society to basic health care and other services. This has helped to reduce poverty to 4.2 per cent and to raise the level of education and school enrolment to 99 per cent, and has helped reproductive health services in rural areas.

Based on our conviction of the need for solidarity and complementarity among peoples and States, and on our successful experience in Tunisia with the national solidarity fund, widely known as the 26-26 fund, Tunisia's President has proposed to the international community the creation of a world solidarity fund responsible for collecting voluntary contributions for projects to combat poverty in the least developed countries. This appeal is a response to the resolution of the Millennium Summit calling for halving the number of people living in poverty, on less than $1 a day, by 2015.

The Commission for Social Development has organized many events throughout the International Year of Volunteers in order to build recognition for volunteering and to involve young people, especially in safeguarding the environment. A number of young volunteers have planted trees in vast areas threatened with desertification. Also in the course of the year, a network of associations recognized that there was increased activity in voluntary campaigns benefiting sectors of society with special needs, such as the elderly, orphans, the sick and the injured. A network of Tunisian organizations and associations came together and participated directly in comprehensive Government projects.

In conclusion, I wish to extend my congratulations and thanks to the United Nations Volunteers programme, which has successfully organized the coordination of the activities of the International Year of Volunteers. I would urge everyone to continue their efforts to strengthen voluntary activities and give them the strategic position they deserve, because of their importance in all societies, and in particular developing societies.

Mr. Fonseca (Brazil): I am pleased to join previous speakers in expressing our satisfaction at the outcome of the International Year of Volunteers. The International Year drew the attention of a wider public to the many positive impacts of voluntary action and provided new impetus to it. Its success is a result not only of the dynamic nature of volunteer activity across the world, but also of the galvanizing work done by the United Nations Volunteers programme. I congratulate its Executive Coordinator, Ms. Sharon Capeling-Alakija, and her staff. I am sure that volunteerism is more strongly supported by the international community today.

I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his report. We agree with his assessment that voluntary action, although a powerful tool to fight social exclusion, has been largely overlooked as an instrument to enhance the impact of social policies. We noted with particular interest his observation that volunteering is believed to account for between 8 and 14 per cent of gross domestic product in the world.

In Brazil the decentralization of resources and of decision-making has been possible in the education sector by actively pursuing parental and community involvement and participation in schools. This strategy has allowed for significant gains in the use of existing resources, management efficiency and overall performance, with a positive impact on student enrolment, the quality of education and the allocation of budgetary resources. The widely recognized positive results of the Brazilian HIV/AIDS programme that has helped stabilize the progression of the disease while increasing the well-being of sick people would not have been possible without voluntary action at the community level, with the help of non-governmental

organizations, the media, universities and the private sector and the direct involvement of HIV-positive citizens. Brazil is convinced of the value of building on existing webs of reciprocity, particularly in the areas of education and health.

In his report the Secretary-General reminded us that the Polio Eradication Initiative, spearheaded by United Nations Children's Fund and the World Health Organization, brought infection rates down by 99 per cent with the help of over 10 million volunteers, mostly from local communities. Its manifold positive results clearly indicate that this is an experience to be replicated as the international community struggles to eradicate and control other deadly diseases, such as HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis, and fulfil its people-centred agenda. Brazil shares the view that the United Nations system can only benefit from the increased involvement of volunteers in its activities. As a member of the core group that contributed to the drafting of the resolution presented by Japan and the Netherlands, which we are about to consider, Brazil believes that the time is ripe for the international community to adopt the series of recommendations before us on ways in which Governments and the United Nations system could support volunteering.

Volunteering has always been a feature of Brazilian society. A watershed in volunteerism in my country was the campaign launched in the early 1990s called Citizenship Action against Deprivation and for Life, championed by the sociologist and non-governmental organization leader Herbert de Souza, who was known as Betinho. The positive effects of that campaign helped shed new light on the potential significance of individual and collective voluntary action and its social impact. Drawing on the value of this experience, the Solidarity Community Council established in 1996 its volunteers programme as an important element in the broader effort to provide support and incentives for the organization and strengthening of civil society.

This programme greatly contributed to the expansion of volunteerism in Brazil. Although there are no official estimates, recent research suggests that approximately 25 per cent of the Brazilian population of more than 170 million is engaged in some sort of volunteer work. According to these studies, the number of volunteer organizations in Brazil leaped from some 1,000 to 4,000 between 1988 and 1998. In most cases, these are grass-roots organizations through which civic participation and mutual aid are reinforced, often within communities with very limited financial resources, but with a wealth of imagination and good will. The private sector and non-governmental organizations have also had an increasingly significant role in promoting voluntary action.

Brazil has been engaged in the International Year through a network of 40 centres for the promotion of volunteers. The initiatives organized during the year were coordinated by a national committee composed of representatives of non-governmental organizations, businessmen and businesswomen and representatives of Government and the media, under the leadership of Ms. Ruth Cardoso, President of the Solidarity Community Programme. The activities carried out, such as a series of debates and social events, involved the participation of personalities from all segments of society, including the media, research institutions, representatives of the young, older persons and persons with disabilities, in an effort to promote volunteering in its many forms and to encourage people to engage in it.

The lessons of this successful experience point in the direction of a new pattern of the relationship between State and society, in which the duty of the State and the responsibility of the citizen are complementary dimensions of one identical process of participation and social development.

Mr. Moutari (Niger) (*spoke in French*): The need to help one's neighbour, the selfless spirit of generosity that we call altruism, is as ancient as the world. Starting with the first communal activities to provide mutual assistance right through to multilateral programmes that are now being implemented at the global level, humankind has always sought to improve the imperfect world in which we live. Whether we are talking about the first collective efforts to encourage self-help at the village level, including the first community cooperatives, or individual actions taken by outstanding personalities of world renown, such as Albert Schweitzer and Mahatma Ghandi, among others, it is voluntary service that serves as the basis for the most noble human endeavours.

There is nothing particularly new in the desire to fight to assuage the distress and destitution of others. What is new — and what is one of the characteristics of our century — is this collective determination that we see everywhere to tackle the very causes of poverty. Development is precisely the tool that has been chosen,

and with progress made in international efforts in this area, voluntary service may itself become part of the development endeavour. We are not talking about charity here; we are talking about helping our neighbours to help themselves. That is the point of modern volunteerism, be it in the various United Nations forums or in areas where there is great distress. The nations of the world have proven that they have faith in volunteerism.

At the end of this International Year of Volunteers, 2001, proclaimed by resolution 52/17 of 20 November 1997, I wish to state on behalf of my country that Niger has approached this very important event in the new millennium with an unshakeable faith in the ability of human beings to help each other.

As we all know, volunteers play the crucial role in poverty reduction and peace-building, areas that are current priorities for Niger. This is not just a development objective; it is a key challenge for human rights in the twenty-first century. Poverty eradication proceeds from strengthening human capacity, reinforcing civil society and creating an enabling environment for good governance at the local level through voluntary service.

The Government of the Niger has made the implementation of its poverty reduction strategy a national priority. This strategy offers many opportunities for volunteers to provide high-quality services to help to eradicate poverty. With the special programme of the President of the Republic that started in 2001 and seeks to build 1,000 classrooms, 1,000 health care units and 100 mini-dams annually, the authorities of the Niger rely on national volunteers to provide teachers and health care personnel in schools and health units built within the framework of this programme. Efforts by our authorities, with the support of our development partners — in particular the United Nations Development Programme, through the United Nations Volunteers — are all good signs for the promotion of volunteerism in development, which is participative and decentralized.

In Niger, the entire evolution of the issue of development comes down to a fundamental question: how to reach poor people and see to it that they are able to become masters of their own development and improve their living conditions. It is from this perspective that the role of volunteerism is perceived as a decisive factor for poverty eradication.

After a year of intense activity by volunteers within their organizations, I should now like, on behalf of the Government of the Niger, to thank and congratulate all volunteers and to profoundly thank the National Committee of the International Year of Volunteers in the Niger.

In the light of the very positive outcome with regard to the objectives set for the International Year of Volunteers — that is, recognition, facilitation and the establishment of a network to promote volunteerism — today offers us a good opportunity to say that we hope that the results of the Year will go on beyond 2001. We are convinced that volunteerism is playing, and will continue to play, an important and effective role in sustainable human development, and therefore it needs to be better structured and better supported.

Allow me, since we so very much appreciate volunteers and volunteerism, to solemnly reaffirm our support for draft resolution A/56/L.27, entitled "Recommendations on support for volunteering", introduced by Japan, which has been submitted to the General Assembly. I would like to add Niger's name to the list of sponsors of this resolution.

Long live volunteerism as an effective tool to combat poverty!

Mr. Basnet (Nepal): I am honoured to speak before the Assembly on the agenda item dealing with social development, a subject of paramount importance for us all. I am particularly pleased to be present here today, the Day of Volunteers, which officially closes the International Year of Volunteers launched the same day last year. On this occasion, on behalf of His Majesty's Government of Nepal and on my own behalf, I pay tribute to all volunteers and all promoters of volunteering for their selfless and individualistic contribution to the cause of economic and social development around the world.

Social development has been a high priority item on the international community's agenda for a very long time. The promotion of economic and social advancement of all peoples was at the core of the United Nations Organization when its foundation was laid. We have since witnessed many international initiatives to pursue that objective, including conferences focusing on various aspects of social development.

The World Summit for Social Development, held in 1995 at Copenhagen, was a milestone in this process, when we committed ourselves to creating an environment conducive to achieving social development goals. Eradicating poverty, promoting productive employment and enhancing social integration were among the areas of core commitments.

In June last year, when we assembled in Geneva to review and assess the implementation of the commitments made at Copenhagen, we reaffirmed our earlier commitments and also agreed to complement our political will with mobilization and allocation of additional resources.

These and other international conferences, especially those of the 1990s, have been extremely instrumental in creating a greater awareness in the field of social development. A growing realization that economic development should be integrated with social and cultural aspects, which determine the advancement of societies, is now in place. The level of social progress that we see today has greatly benefited from the high priority accorded to social development in our national policies as well as on the international agenda. A great chunk of credit for any achievement we have made so far goes to the international volunteers, including, in particular, the United Nations Volunteers.

As is obvious, however, much remains to be done before we can truly call it a success story. The situation of millions of people in developing countries, particularly the least developed ones among them, remains gloomy. Inequality within and among countries continues to grow. Abject poverty and endemic deprivation reflect the stark reality of the present world. Social injustice, exclusion and marginalization have further increased. My delegation strongly believes that such an unacceptable situation should not be allowed to continue.

A holistic approach is required to solve all these social problems, including those relating to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family, as all these are intricately related to the bigger social system.

We in Nepal have always accorded a high priority to the development of the social sector. Convinced that pervasive poverty is the biggest and most formidable enemy in our way, we have adopted poverty eradication as the sole objective of our five-year development plan that is under way, and beyond, with a view to eradicating absolute poverty within the next 20 years. We have directed over seven tenths of development resources to the rural sector and accorded high priority to the enhancement of people's participation in resource mobilization, the implementation of development activities and balanced and equitable distribution of the outcomes of development to local levels. The results have been encouraging and the role of volunteering has been crucial in all aspects of the process.

In addition to a host of problems that we are facing in our pursuit of development, terrorism, international and domestic, has emerged as an alarming threat to humanity and a major challenge to social development. We feel that there is no possibility of furthering social development, particularly in poor countries where resources are extremely limited, unless this new challenge is effectively addressed. We believe that a coordinated international effort is a must to solve this problem.

At present, my own country, Nepal, is facing the threat of domestic terrorism. While we are actively committed to and engaged in uplifting the socio-economic status of the people and institutionalizing multiparty democracy, a group of terrorists, the so-called Maoists, are launching an armed struggle in order to destroy our democratic norms and values. They are engaged in such activities as killing innocent people, extorting money from the people and terrorizing them, looting the financial institutions, launching armed attacks on security forces and development structures, blocking the process of development activities in rural areas and creating an intolerable state of terror. Compelled by the so-called Maoists' abrupt and unilateral withdrawal from peace talks and their resumption of terrorizing armed attacks on the institution of national pride, the Royal Nepalese Army, His Majesty's Government of Nepal, consistent with its commitment to fighting terrorism in all its manifestations and at all levels, has declared a state of emergency in the country, in accordance with the 1990 Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal. In this context, we express our sincere thanks to the international community for supporting us in our efforts to contain terrorism at the national level. The Government is determined to end the chaotic situation in Nepal and to bring the terrorists to justice as soon as possible.

There is no doubt that the International Year of Volunteers has created an extensive awareness that there is an important link between volunteering and

economic and social development and that volunteering can play a significant role in a number of activities, including the peace-building efforts of the United Nations. We commend the United Nations Development Programme for launching the United Nations Volunteers programme in over 130 countries of the world and the United Nations Volunteers for coordinating activities to bring to the fore all aspects relating to volunteering. We commend the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report, which captures the essence of all problems and prospects associated with volunteering and suggests measures to be taken at different levels.

The tradition of volunteering is at the core of my country's values and I am proud to note that it has been prompted to new heights by the international drive to promote volunteering. Nepal remains an eager and dedicated actor to make the Year of Volunteers and success. While we acknowledge the contributions of international volunteers, complementing our own in our modern nation-building efforts since 1974, we are pleased to be a net supplier of expertise in the sense that we are one of the top five suppliers of volunteers and second among the developing countries. Over 1,200 Nepalese have so far worked as volunteers abroad under the United Nations flag for various programmes and missions around the world.

To conclude, the official Year of Volunteers has come to a close, but it has been a big eye-opener as to how people from anywhere, with their free will, skill and dedication, can contribute to building strong and healthy societies around the world. The Year represents a successful beginning in that sense and, as a co-sponsor of the draft resolution on volunteering to be adopted later this afternoon, Nepal is ready to do its part in promoting volunteering as a cost-effective gift of modern times and, as always, to further the cause of development.

Ms. Grobbelaar (South Africa): In South Africa, volunteerism has a long history. It was through the spirit of volunteerism that South Africa achieved its democracy and in the spirit of what we call ubuntu that we have turned volunteerism into an instrument of action. South African citizens from across the country, from the public and private sectors, are encouraged to join the movement of volunteers.

Not long ago, members of the South African emergency rescue team volunteered their services in assisting authorities in India to deal with a massive earthquake. Similarly, another team of volunteers joined in rescue efforts following the Turkish earthquake. South African volunteers have assisted with natural disasters in our subregion, including floods in Mozambique and Zimbabwe.

The Secretary-General's report places volunteerism at the centre of any strategy aimed at poverty reduction, sustainable development and social integration. In this regard, the South African Government, in August this year, unveiled a programme of action of volunteers to combat poverty and HIV/AIDS and to address a number of key social challenges. The programme of action is a joint initiative between the department of social development, Volunteer South Africa, United Nations Volunteers, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), civil society, as well as other volunteer movements, to act against poverty and the HIV/AIDS pandemic. It is part of an attempt to improve the quality of life of all South Africans, and it is also part of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) which aims at reviving and regenerating Africa.

Last year, Volunteer South Africa 2001 was established to coordinate the celebration of our national year of volunteers in South Africa. A committee was elected to take the process forward. Volunteer South Africa is registered as a non-governmental organization with the directorate for non-profit organizations, thus complying with all the requirements of registration. Volunteer South Africa 2001 consists of national structures representing all sectors of Government, and includes non-governmental and community-based organizations, labour unions, the public and private sectors, the media and the United Nations Development Programme.

In order to promote the letter and spirit of the draft resolution on recommendations on support for volunteering (A/56/L.27) before us today for adoption, South Africa is not only one of the sponsors of the resolution, but our authorities are also in the process of studying current legislation, with special reference to labour laws, in order to determine how it impacts on volunteering. In addition, Government policies, with special reference to education, health, welfare, safety and security, environment and sport, are being drafted in an effort to see where these policies ignore the potential for volunteer service. A public survey on

perceptions and attitudes on volunteering in all sectors of society is also being undertaken, as well as an assessment of the economic value of volunteering. The result will therefore be a comprehensive set of recommendations, which will ensure a volunteer-friendly legislative and policy framework for South Africa.

Before the end of this month, the South African public will participate in a mass concert at the Union Buildings in Pretoria, which is our seat of Government, to celebrate volunteering, usher in the festive season and recognize the important contribution of faith-based volunteering, focusing on all faiths represented in South Africa.

In March 2002, South Africa will join with other Southern African Development Community (SADC) members to launch a volunteer vision regional conference, aimed at exploring, sharing, networking and inspiring one another in volunteering as part of the African renaissance.

For South Africa, the guiding principle is that communities have the capacity to control their own lives. Their efforts must be increased and supported. This principle supports the belief that the needy are the experts with regard to their own situation, and therefore have a definite role to play in addressing their needs or changing their own situation.

Our vision is to develop a society in which the right of all citizens to engage in voluntary or community action is recognized and valued as an essential part of democracy. It is also crucial to develop a society in which citizens choose to exercise that right because they want to be active participants in helping others. Society's involvement is viewed as an important element, because it has a great potential for promoting the spirit of volunteerism.

As we have stated before, volunteerism is no stranger to South African people.

The meeting rose at noon.